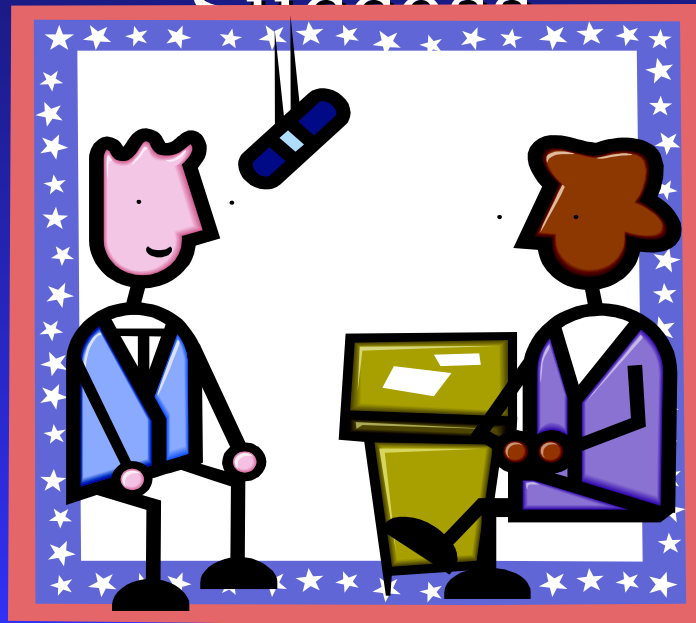


# PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEDIA INTERVIEW

A Systematic Approach for

Success



“I have no power to  
prosecute. I have only the  
power to embarrass, to  
humiliate, to expose.”

Geraldo Rivera



# Legitimate Pre-Interview Concerns:

- “Will the questions be fair?”
- “Does the reporter have a hidden agenda?”
- “Can I control the interview process?”
- “What are the rules of engagement?”
- “Will I be misquoted?”
- “Will the reporter understand the issues here?”

# Journalistic “Balance” - A Modern Definition



Critic's  
Message

Your  
Message

# Why Do Interviews?

- Because a reporter has asked you questions?
- Because you have Communications Objectives of your own

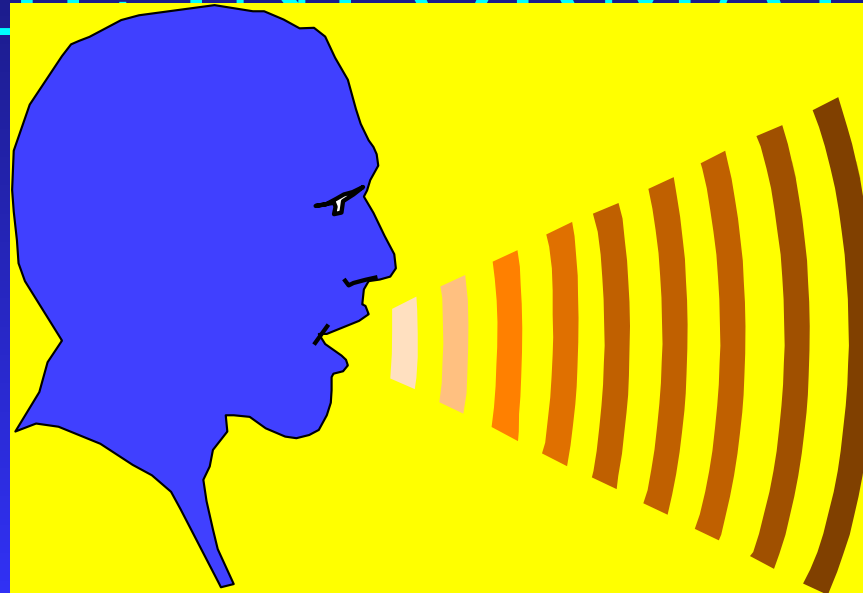
# Remember, This Process is About CONTROL

- Control of the media to the extent you can.
- Control of yourself in all situations



Remember, you start in a  
great position. You have  
something the media  
wants.....

THE INFORMATION



# You will be ready to conduct effective

## Interviews when you...

- Can identify the news questions you would ask if you were the reporter
- Can frame answers to those questions
- And can set your own agenda for news interviews





# Interviews: The Reporter's Perspective

- Heart and soul of the news
- Give depth, background, perspective, and personality to news
- Quotes are interview excerpts to explain, inform, & illuminate.....They put the human face on journalism
- Reporters expect to get enough background to understand any story they cover.

# Preparing for a media interview is a systematic effort

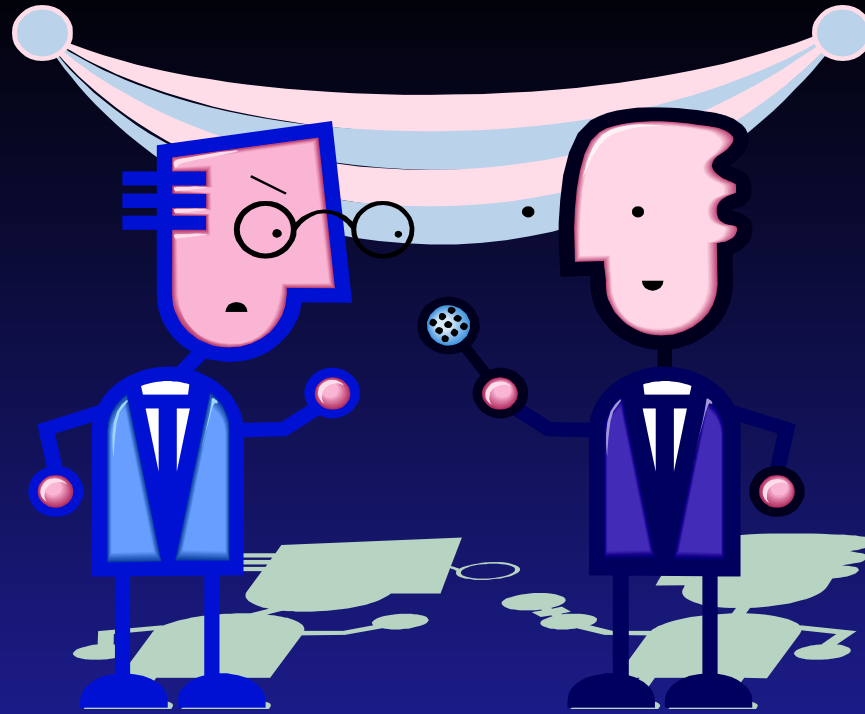


- Brevity, simplicity, and clarity are key to *all* interviews.
- Prepare.....Don't "shoot from the lip." (Your organization is too important.)
- "Don't take it personally.....they don't."

Establish a checklist and stay with it!

# Most Common Interview Mistakes:

- Treating the interview like you would normal conversation
- Overloading the system (literally, “talking too much,” giving too much detail, and/or using too much jargon)
- Merely answering questions and not taking charge of your answers



# Effective Media Interviews

Seven Steps to Success

# Step One: Define/Refine the Issue

- Establish rapport
- Be polite and communicate a wish to help
- Don't automatically agree to or refuse an interview
- Stress *you* need information first and negotiate to get it



# Step One: Define Refine the Issue



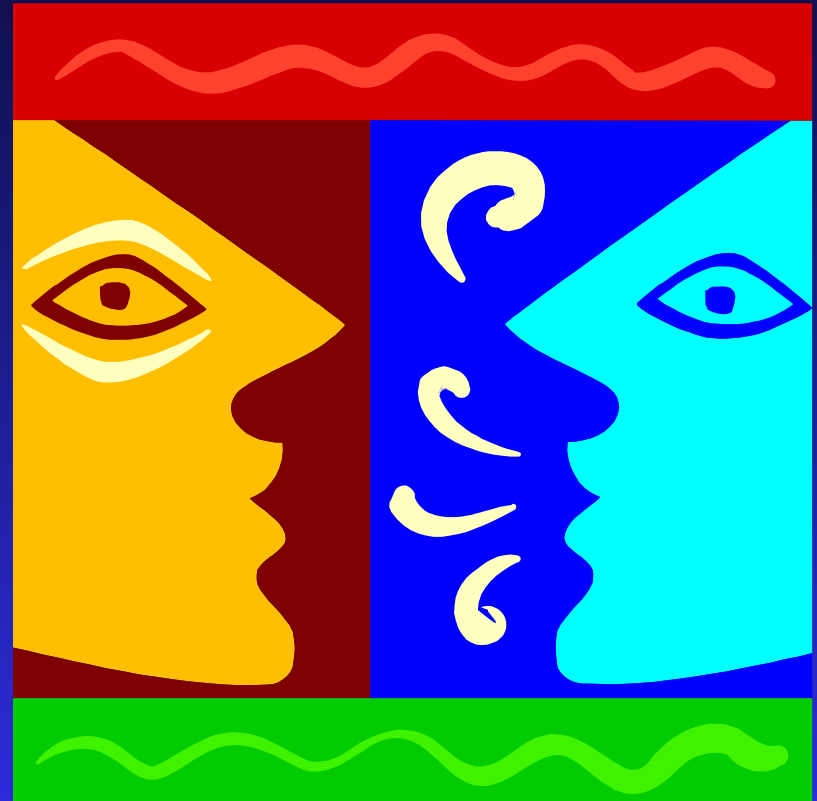
- Attempt to Determine the Reporter's Agenda by Asking Questions:
  - ◆ Reporter's name & affiliation?
  - ◆ What is it about?
  - ◆ What particular aspect are you focusing on?
- ◆ What's your story or angle?
- ◆ Can I ask how much you know about this issue?
- ◆ Can I send (fax) some background?
- ◆ When is your deadline and I'll get back to you?

# Background Information Versus “Press Releases”

- Definition of a Press Release:  
“Dropping a rose petal into the Grand Canyon and waiting to hear an echo.”
- Background information: Usually a tightly written fact sheet (outline or “bullet” format) which gives key background, facts, organizational policy, current status, etc. *Not* a press release!

# Step One: Define/Refine the Issue

- Determine *your* purpose/feasibility
- Research the answers
  - ◆ Consult subject matter experts
  - ◆ Formulate your own questions
  - ◆ Determine if new developments or issues exist





# Step One: Define/Refine the Issue



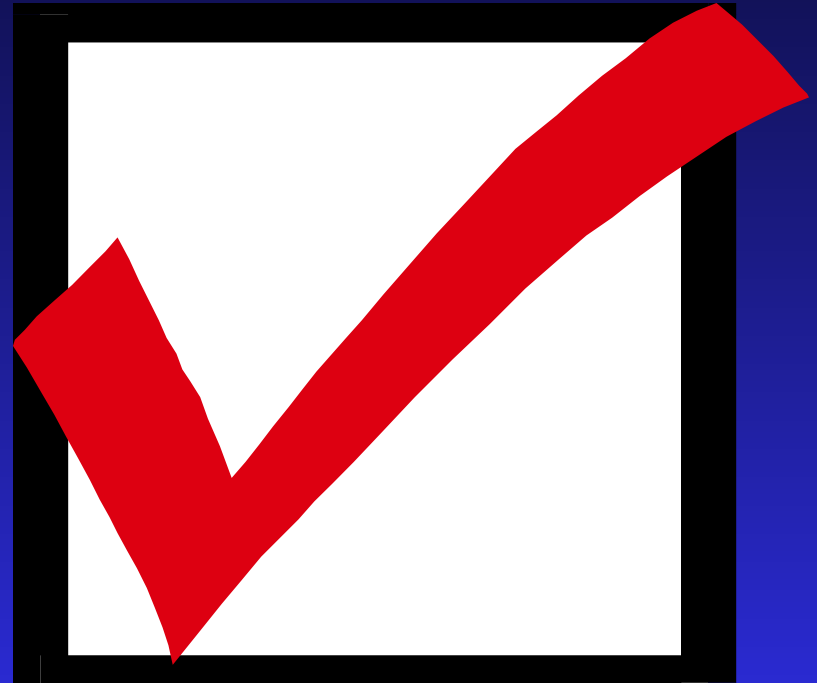
- Once the issue is clearly defined in your mind, ask yourself the most important question of all....."*Am I really the one who should be doing this interview?*"

# Step Two: Develop the Response

- Response: A prepared statement triggered by (hopefully) an anticipated question.
- Consists of two elements:
  - ◆ Information (answers the question)
  - ◆ Communications Objective (the organization's position or perspective on the issue)

# Step Two: Develop the Response

- Communications Objectives (Messages) are the KEY to success. Without them, you are at the reporter's mercy.



The media claim they don't like 'em, but they always use 'em!

# What is a “Message?”

- A *concise* point you want the audience to know and remember
- Tells why the issue/program/etc is important *in the audience's real world*.
- Is the key point(s) you are going to get across *no matter what!*

# What Does Being “Message Driven” Mean?

- Knowing what your messages are.
- Being consistent in delivering them.
- Assertively bringing them into the interview.
- Displaying the empathy that shows you *mean* the message you deliver.

# Messages are most effective when framed in newsworthy terms.



- New & significant
- A spin-off of a trend or event
- Adds a new wrinkle to a current news story
- Gives a local tie to a national or regional issue

# Messages - “The Art of the Quotable Quote.”

- Brief
- Stands on its own
- Uses common language & avoids jargon
- Colorful or metaphor- ical (if appropriate)
- Passionate or energetic



“Ethos, Logos & Pathos”  
Aristotle

# Message Length



- Messages for broad- cast media average between 5 and 20 seconds (normal “sound bite” = 8 sec.) Messages for print rarely exceed 1 to 3 lines.



# Create a Theme for Your Interview

- What is a theme? A word or word picture to frame your message(s) in a memorable way.
- Reinforcing a theme throughout the interview keeps you and your messages focused. Ideally, a theme should dominate the interview and tie the messages together.
- Examples: “Building the foundation”, “Back to the basics”, “A few good men”

# Step Two: Develop the Response

## ■ Goal:

- ◆ To begin addressing the issue from where you feel the most comfortable, not necessarily where the reporter's questions are trying to lead you.



Messages and themes keep on target!

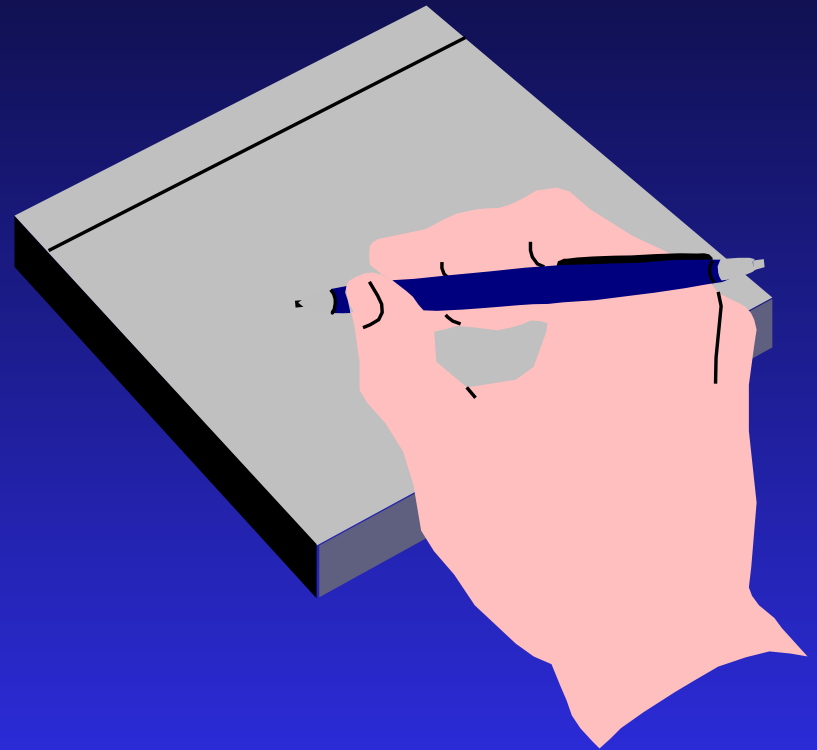
# Step Three: Brainstorm Potential Questions



- Think of everything you think you could be asked, to include the worst possible questions.
- Consider the rule of “5x5”

# Step Four: Answer Questions Briefly in Writing

- Promotes recall
- Ensures accuracy
  - ◆ Especially useful with statistics, complex issues
- Creates a guide for others (for continuity and consistency)

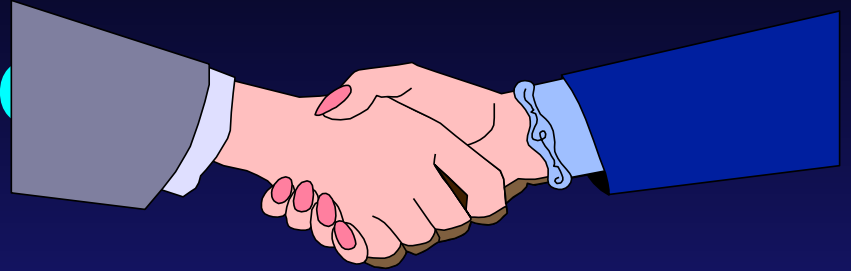


# Step Five: (If Appropriate) Rehearse Out Loud



- Murder Board: Staff role-plays the press & critiques performance
- Make sure you have staff ask the tough questions/give honest feedback
- Practice quotes/bites, but be careful not to sound “rehearsed”

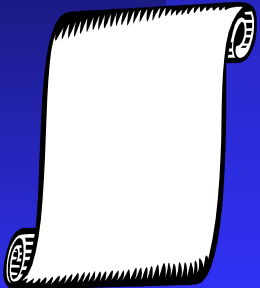
# Step Six: Establish the Ground Rules



- Call back on time
- Reiterate the subject of the interview
- Establish the areas *not* open for discussion
- Establish interview length, location, day/time (choose interview site carefully)

# Enforcing Your “Bill of Rights”

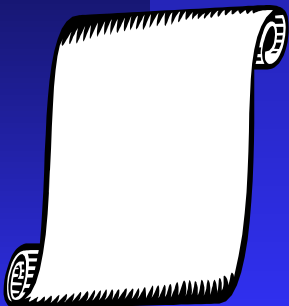
- In interviews of a spontaneous nature, you have the right.....
  - ◆ To know who is interviewing you and who he/she represents
  - ◆ To have *total* agreement by both parties of ground rules, no matter how hastily arranged
  - ◆ To be treated courteously, even with tough questions



# Enforcing Your “Bill of Rights”

■ Spontaneous interviews (continued).  
You have the right.....

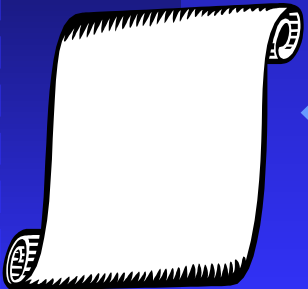
- ◆ Not to be physically threatened or impaired by lights too close or micro- phones shoved in your face
- ◆ To break off the interview after a “reasonable” time following the answers to important, main questions





# Enforcing Your “Bill of Rights”

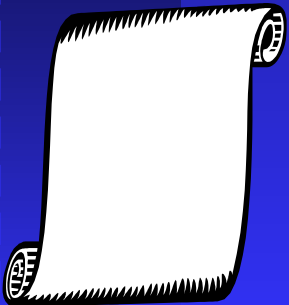
- In pre-arranged office or studio interviews, you have the right.....
  - ◆ To all the rights previously noted
  - ◆ To know general content and thrust of the interview so you can research & prepare
  - ◆ To know generally how long the interview will last or your limit
  - ◆ To have a representative with you



# Enforcing Your “Bill of Rights”

■ Prearranged or studio interviews (continued). You have the right.....

- ◆ To make your own audio or videotape of the interview
- ◆ To be told when you are being recorded
- ◆ To be allowed to answer without constant interruption or harassment, assuming your answers are brief and to the point
- ◆ To have an accurate introduction

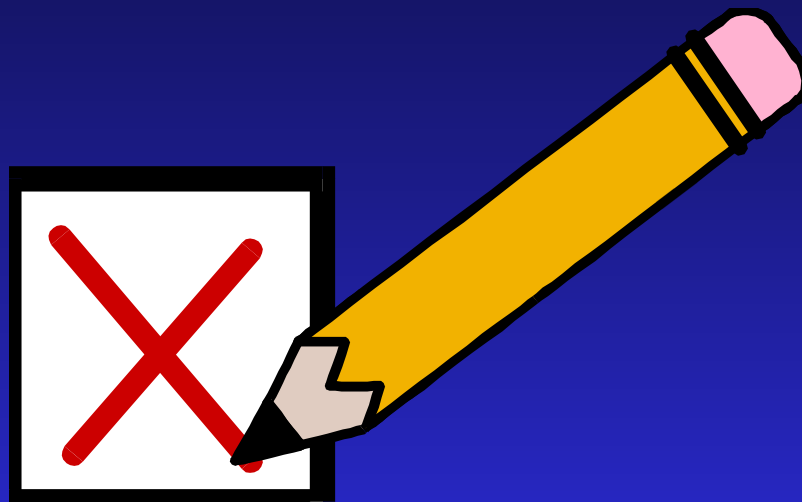


# Some Interview “Don’ts”

- Don’t ask for questions in advance
- Don’t argue
- Don’t ask to see a story before it runs
- Don’t allow a reporter to violate ground rules
- Don’t pass the buck

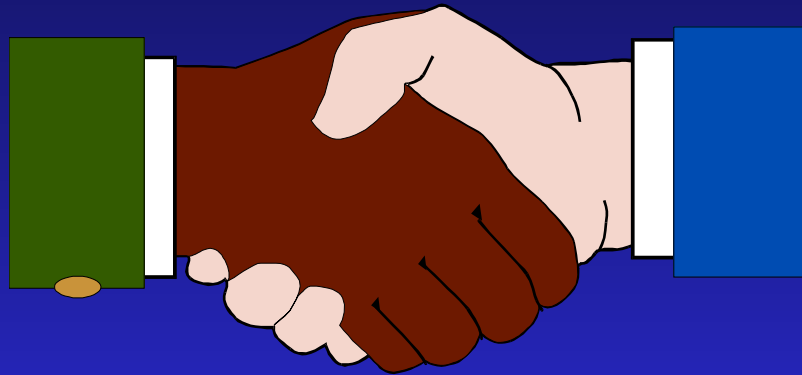


# Additional “Tips of the Trade”



- Use concrete, short sentences & active verbs
- Be an active listener
- Be extremely careful if asked to agree to a paraphrase
- TELL THE TRUTH!
- Empathy and humility enhance believability

# Step Six: Establish The Ground Rules.....A Final Thought



They've told their boss the interview is a "go"

- Once you get to this point, you have negotiated a good faith contract with the reporter. **KEEP YOUR SIDE OF THE CONTRACT.**

# Step Seven: Conduct the Interview

- With Professionalism
- With Confidence
- With Control
- With Adequate Preparation



# Techniques of Control

## ■ Packaging/Bundling

- ◆ Quantify your info and tie it together giving the reporter verbal clues to follow
- ◆ “We’ve got three new initiatives to solve the problem and they are....”

## ■ Hooking

- ◆ Begs the question & baits the reporter to ask the question you want
- ◆ “I think your audience may be interested in our two major concerns and initiatives....”

# Techniques of Control

## ■ Bridging

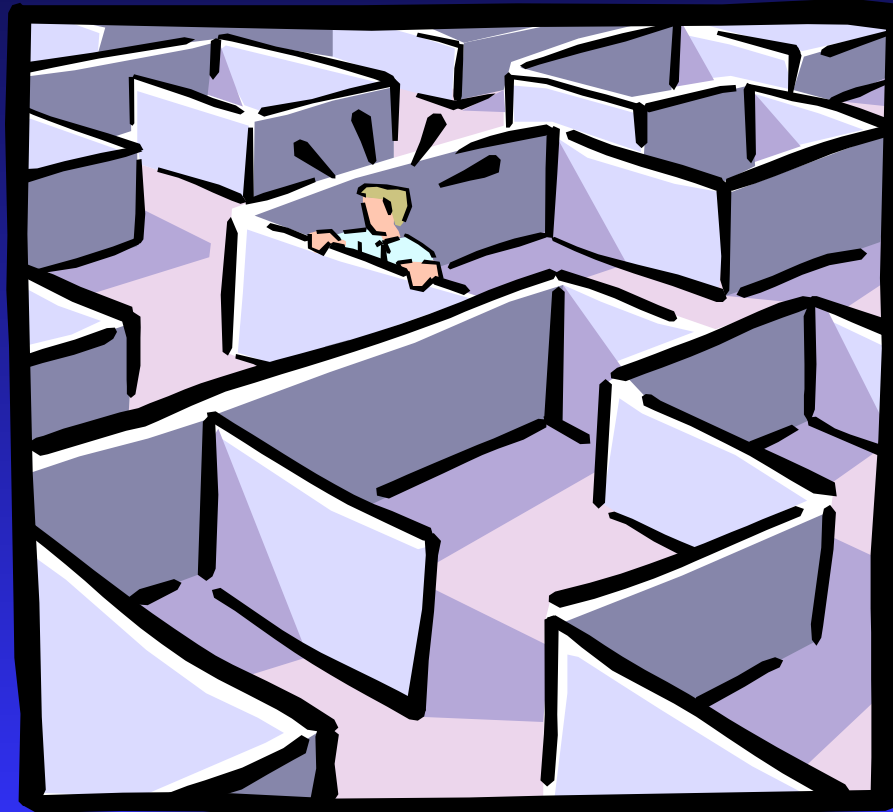
- ◆ Verbal maneuver to reform question in terms most favorable to you
- ◆ Lead in Phrases:
  - ◆ “That’s one perspective...”
  - ▢ “What concerns me even more..”

## ■ Flagging

- ◆ Body/hand/facial gestures, tone of voice, leaning forward to make a point, etc.
- ◆ Why? Draws attention to what you are identifying as a key response.



# Understanding the “On The Record/Off The Record” Maze

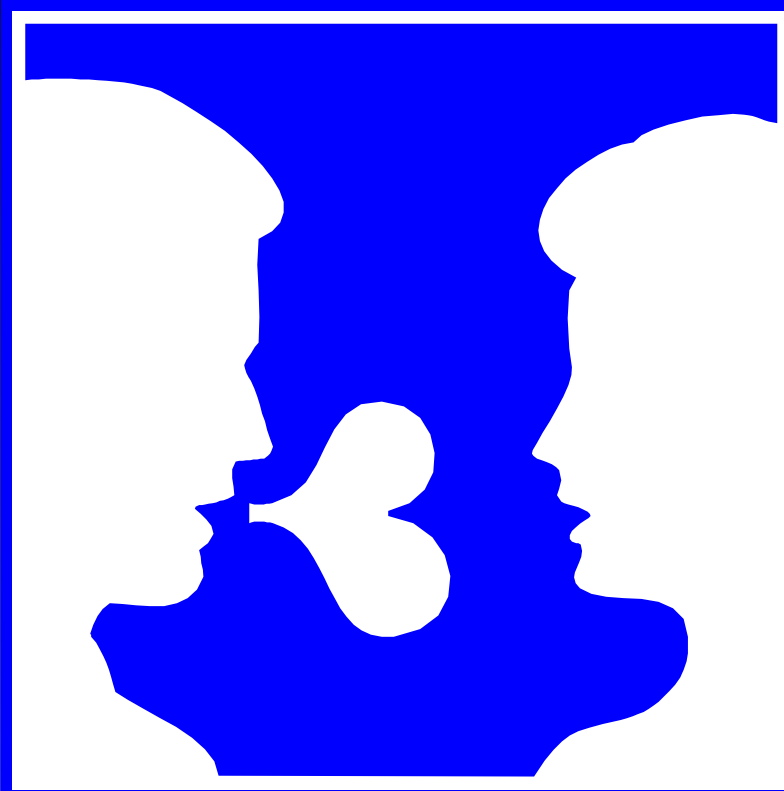


# On The Record

- Everything you say can be reported verbatim and you can be identified by name and position as the source of the information (NOTE: This is the preferred way to do business)



# Off The Record



- The reporter *agrees* to take information from a protected source without doing the story or identifying the informant in any way. (NOTE: This does *not* preclude the reporter from obtaining the information from other sources.)

# On Background

- The reporter can use the information but not directly name the source.
- Good technique for educating a reporter



# On Deep Background



- The reporter can use the information but cannot name the source or the agency
- NOTE: This is little more than a leak and, while used by the press, will not enhance one's status with them.

Cicero: "This is the last refuge of the weak."

# On Categories of Release.....

- As a matter of principle and basic policy, you should be prepared to live with everything you say to a reporter or don't say it at all!



# A Final Thought



- “EXPECT BIAS, BUT DEMAND FAIRNESS”
- Systematic preparation protects you and your agency. It’s the key to interview success.

Who says they get to be in charge?